

Packaging an image

Hayward exporter's small investments paid off in a big way

Steven E.F. Brown

Jamal Qureshi made a whopping \$935 his first year in business. He and his wife, Akila Attarwala, ran JQ American Corp. out of their Fremont apartment back in 1998, exporting tools and equipment to oil companies in the Middle East and Africa.

When customers called, one of them would answer the phone and the other would pick up their baby and take her outside lest she cry.

"We didn't want them to know it was our home. Perception is very important in business," said Attarwala.

"We put in another telephone and fax line," said Qureshi. "We bought a device that played music while they were on hold. We printed letterhead. These are small expenses but very important."

Those small but important expenses allowed JQ American to grow from that \$935 to \$1 million in annual revenue in 2002. Now Qureshi is on the move, expanding his company into new markets.

He has come a long way from that Fremont apartment.

After making so little money that first year, Qureshi was ready to throw in the towel. His wife urged him to hang in a little longer, however, and serendipitously she found some information that saved them.

"I was reading a business magazine and they had an info page at the end," said Attarwala. "I saw the contact information for the Department of Commerce. They put us in touch with the Oakland Export Assistance Center, which has a huge database of trade leads."

"He is sort of the quintessential American business success story," said Rod Hirsch, director of the Oakland Export Assistance Center. "We got him into markets in north and sub-Saharan Africa. Even Europe. He's expanded his product line from oil and gas equipment to medical equipment and pharmaceuticals."

Last year, Qureshi won the President's E-award, the highest award given by the Department of Commerce. And, on April 9, JQ American received the SBA's 2003 award for exporter of the year in the San Francisco district.

Qureshi, a native of Bhopal, left India after earning a law degree and a master's degree in applied chemistry to work in the oil business. He moved to the United Arab Emirates, and he and Attarwala, a graduate of Bombay University and Pace University in New York, decided to start their company in the United States because of its easy business climate. "I could never have

started this business in the Middle East," said Qureshi. "You have to have a local sponsor there, and there are a lot of procedures and regulations. You also cannot operate from your house. The U.S. is a good place for individuals to start their own business."

Now with seven employees in the Hayward office, JQ American has 20 major customers in the oil and gas fields, as well as 13 on the medical side.

Qureshi and Attarwala plan to open an office in Rabat, Morocco, which will handle their burgeoning business there and in Algeria.

Qureshi also plans to open a satellite office in Qatar, and hopes to make contacts in the oil-rich Caspian Sea region on his trip to Kazakhstan in the fall.

Steven E. F. Brown is a staff writer for the San Francisco Business Times.

The original article can be found at

<http://www.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/stories/2003/07/07/smallb1.html>.